

# The picture of success

She's one of the world's fastest women on two wheels but champion Australian cyclist Anna Meares still seizes every opportunity to spend time in the slow lane

**P**ACKED away in a shed at Anna Meares' Adelaide home is a stash of old paint, brushes, easels and canvases that sat untouched for four years.

Art had long been one of her passions but chasing Olympic gold kept getting in the way.

Until now. As Meares prepares for her third Commonwealth Games, she has turned to the most inspirational moment she can think of and is capturing it on canvas.

"It's a modernised image of my reaction to winning (Olympic gold) at Athens," she said.

"For me it presents to people an image that is one of my favourite ever captured - the moment I related the No.1 (on the screen) next to my name.

"It's pretty goose-tingly." Some sports psychologists encourage athletes to "switch-off" from their intense training load. While most of her male teammates opt for video games, Meares has turned to painting and gardening.

Since enrolling in an art class with The Sea House in Glenelg, Meares has been working to complete her painting before she leaves Australia for Commonwealth Games preparation in three weeks.

The painting will be auctioned as a fund-raiser for the McGuinness McDermott Foundation in October.

"I had a really big art interest when I was at school and I've got all my easels and canvases and pastels and paints," she said. "It's been in the shed for years. Now I've started this art class I'm going to start bringing it out."

Cycling remains a major focus of Meares' life but it doesn't consume her.

"I like to see myself as more than just a bike rider. As a family person, a mate, and I have hobbies and interests that don't involve exercise," she said.

One thing keeping her busy is school visits to share her life story, in particular with primary school students, of whom she loves watching the "simplicity of their understanding".

"Every time I go to a school I take my medal. I never saw an Olympic or Commonwealth medal



**REECE HOMFRAY**

until I won one, so I always make a point of taking them," she said. In the classroom, Meares is asked everything from "how much does your bike cost?" to, "do you get to drink Coke and eat pizza?"

But the conversation usually turns to the students. "They put their hand up to ask a question and it ends up them talking about being on a bike," she said. "They might tell me when their dad took their training wheels off, when they had a crash at their mate's place, putting stunt-pegs on their BMX bike. But it's great to hear that sort of stuff."

On top of international competition, for the past year it has been Meares against men.

Meares and Australia's other top female sprinters have been allowed

(domestically) between the three elite (female) riders and up-and-coming (female) riders that we're not challenged and mentally it discourages them to keep pushing on with the sport," Meares said.

"Between the men and the women there's a level of respect, that we're not the lesser party of this sport. It's not an issue of people getting paid out if they get beaten by a girl. It's both parties having a plan and learning from it."

Her most recent male showdown came with Jaron Gardiner at the SuperDrome last month.

The pair had raced twice and were 1-1 when they got to Adelaide. "We had our own little rivalry," Meares said. "He's faster than me so I had to think of a way to inhibit his ability to produce so much speed and I did that really well."

Gardiner beat Meares on the finish line but they both agreed it was a perfect hit-out.

"It's hard. It's really hard," Meares said.

"You don't know anything about them, you don't train with them or race them.

"You go from a situation where you're comfortable to a situation where you're uncomfortable. "It's challenging physically and mentally because it can crack you." It's exactly the type of preparation and mental training Meares is after heading into a huge two years that includes Commonwealth Games, world championships and Olympics.

On the back of two gold medals at the Denmark world championships in March, Meares is eyeing the treble - team sprint, sprint and 500m time trial in India in October.

But she admits to feeling "old" as she grinds her way through another preparation.

At 26, she is the second oldest sprinter in the national team - behind only Victorian Jason Niblett by six months.

"I don't know if it's because I've been in people's eye for a long time that it seems like I've been around for a really long time," she said.

"Not that it's a bad thing though." She rolls her eyes at the thought of how far she has come since her first Commonwealth Games in Manchester in 2002.

"I'm a hell of a lot more confident, I feel more settled, I trust my program and myself and the work I've done in preparation. I'm not fazed by the lights and the stage of the Commonwealth Games. It still drums up the adrenaline but I'm able to control that now."

That begs the question of how much longer can Meares remain at the top of her game?

"I know what it feels like on competition day to be fit, strong, healthy and fast," said Meares, who recently decided to switch allegiances and race for SA instead of her native Queensland.

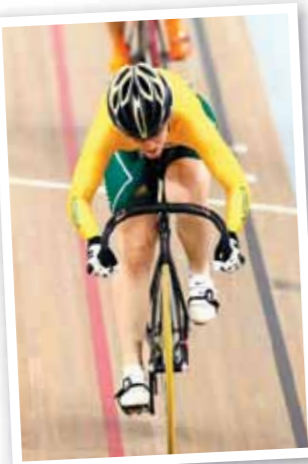
"But I don't think I've reached the limit and I've got a hell of a lot more to improve on."

That means there has been no

serious thought of retirement - not even after London.

"Emotions can cloud the water on decision-making," Meares said.

"When I had my accident (2008) I was thinking about pulling the pin. It was more that I was scared than actually wanting to quit riding a bike. At the moment I'm having fun, I feel like I'm enjoying it more than I ever have and the training group and environment we have here has helped that."



to race men at interstate grand prix meets in the search for a physical and psychological edge.

"There's such a big gap

## Meares finds motivation

OLYMPIC gold medallist Anna Meares doesn't have to look far for motivation these days. In fact, it's often right by her side.

Her husband Mark Chadwick has ended a six-year retirement from competitive cycling and is back on the bike.

Chadwick, who raced on the road in Belgium from 2000-2001, returned to the sport last year and seems to

have found at least some of his old form.

Last weekend he won a Cycling SA road race at Lyndoch before tackling the Tour of Gippsland in Victoria.

And it is his commitment to training and a healthy diet which continues to help Meares in her quest for more Commonwealth and Olympic track glory.

"He's so motivated and the fact that every morning he

gets up at 5.30, 6am to go riding before work makes me feel like when I wake up at 7am, it's not so bad," Meares said.

"We'll both come home some nights tired and we'll decide to eat out but nine times out of 10 we'll choose healthy because Mark goes 'no, I don't want to eat that.' So he helps me across the board."

Reece Homfray



**POWERHOUSE:** Anna Meares enjoys the spoils of success with husband Mark Chadwick after strutting her stuff on the world stage - but she also enjoys a chance to relax with a paintbrush and easel.

Main picture: SIMON CROSS

### ANNA MEARES MEDAL FILE

#### OLYMPICS

2008 Beijing: Silver - sprint  
2004 Athens: Gold - 500m time trial

#### COMMONWEALTH GAMES

2006 Melbourne: Gold - 500m time trial;  
Silver - sprint  
2002 Manchester: Bronze - sprint

#### WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS

2010 Denmark: Gold - 500m time trial, team sprint  
2009 Poland: Gold - team sprint;  
Silver - 500m time trial  
2007 Spain: Gold - 500m time trial;  
Bronze - keirin, sprint, team sprint  
2006 France: Silver - 500m time trial  
2005 United States: Silver - 500m time trial;  
Bronze - sprint  
2004 Australia: Gold - 500m time trial;  
Silver - sprint  
2003 Germany: Silver - keirin